

Inside Washington



Computers for Russia Tense U.S., Britain



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WASHINGTON—The Russians unsuccessful in their efforts to obtain sophisticated computers in the United States, have turned to Britain in their continuing quest.

So far the renewed efforts have been unavailing. The Russian efforts have, however, precipitated new NATO tensions between the United States and Britain about an old controversial topic—East-West trade.

From Paris last week came reports of new British-American friction with respect to sale of computers to Russia. The friction arises in the strategic materials coordinating committee—Co-Com—of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

Central to dispute, according to the Paris reports, is the Kremlin's attempt to buy two big computers from Britain's International Computer, Ltd., for the big Soviet atom-smasher at Serpukhov, now the largest in the world. The \$12 million deal, has reportedly been held up for months in the coordinating committee.

Co-Com, which meets each week in Paris, considers exports of strategic goods, with guidance from an international embargo list which is periodically reviewed. Decisions on export requests must be made unanimously, and high speed computers are on the current list.

British Co-Com delegates, and British computer makers, are said to be pressing for a relaxation of the restrictions with respect to high speed computers. They say privately that the United States has been taking a hard line under new instructions from the Nixon Administration.

REBUFFED IN U.S. — Unmentioned in the reports from Paris, and apparently ignored by the British authorities, is the fact

that the Russians tried and failed to get sophisticated data processing equipment for the Serpukhov particle accelerator from the United States.

As we reported early last month, five U.S. physicists visited that facility early in 1969 to see whether they could use the big accelerator. The group, headed by Dr. Wolfgang Panofsky, director of the Atomic Energy Commission's accelerator at Stanford, was told that access to the facility at Serpukhov would be contingent on the supply of a U.S. built central computer facility there.

The Russians were quite specific. They wanted a CDC 6600—a high speed computer manufactured by Control Data Corp.—or its equivalent, as a scientific quid pro quo.

After the Panofsky group returned to the United States, the Russian request was considered by U.S. government agencies. The AEC issued a report which was criticized by some members of the government's scientific community as underestimating the risks involved in supplying the computer equipment.

In that instance it was Congress, not the Nixon Administration itself, which finally applied a veto to the Russian request. The Senate-House Atomic Energy Committee became concerned about the granting of an export license for a CDC 6600.

"We stopped it," said committee Chairman Chet Holifield, D-Calif., in reporting on the discussions.

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